

### MEDALIST FOR 1974

*For farsighted development of men and facilities and for decisive leadership of research that provided technological foundations for manned flight beyond the speed of sound, safe re-entry of spacecraft, and successful exploration of space.*



FLOYD L. THOMPSON

The test pilots and astronauts got the well-earned headlines and public acclaim for their feats in high-speed flight and manned space travel, but behind these exploits was the dedication and skill of an unsung scientist and research administrator.

His name was Floyd LaVerne Thompson, an ex-Navy aviation mechanic from Salem, Michigan, who was associated with, and ultimately in charge of, the famed Langley Research Center for nearly five decades. When Langley celebrated its Golden Anniversary in 1967, Dr. Thompson had been responsible for every major decision made in the previous 25 years—ranging from the high speed airplane research program to unmanned and manned rocket projects.

Thompson's research began in the mid-twenties when he first joined the Langley team, and long before he became involved in the glamorous excitement of supersonic aircraft and rockets he had made significant contributions to increased flight safety, through the development of qualitative criteria for evaluation of flying and handling characteristics of airplanes.

A graduate of the University of Michigan, he became Langley's Chief of Research in 1945 and Director in 1960, serving in the latter post for the next eight years. Langley operated the Flight Research Center at Edwards, California, and the Wallops Flight Center in Virginia before these two facilities became independent centers, and Langley also was the birthplace of Project Mercury—the first U.S. manned space flight program. It was Dr. Thompson who formed the Space Task Group at Langley, selected its personnel, and laid the groundwork for the subsequent Gemini and Apollo projects.

Thompson retired from government service in 1968 and died July 10, 1976.